

Message Text

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ACTION EB-08

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FM AMEMBASSY MADRID

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4516

INFO AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY RABAT

C O N F I D E N T I A L MADRID 05034

E.O. 11652: XGDS-L

TAGS: EWWT, PEPR, UR, SP

SUBJECT: SOVIET BUNKERING IN ALGECIRAS

REF: STATE 114413 NOTAL

1. MADRID 1794 (ALSO NOTE MADRID 1546, MADRID 1401 AND 77 MADRID 10260) REPORTED THAT AT A LUNCHEON WITH FOREIGN JOURNALISTS FEBRUARY 16, PRIME MINISTER SUAREZ REPLIED TO A QUESTION ABOUT THE SOVIET REQUEST FOR BUNKERING FACILITIES IN ALGECIRAS BY SAYING THE GOS RESPONSE WAS NO. THE PRESS HERE AND THE "INTERNATIONAL HERALD TRIBUNE", THAT WE KNOW OF, SUBSEQUENTLY CARRIED THE STORY WITHOUT IDENTIFYING SUAREZ, AND THOSE REPORTS ARE MOST PROBABLY THE SOURCE OF THE MAGAZINE ARTICLE QUOTED IN REFTEL.

2. SUAREZ' NEGATIVE APPEARS TO HAVE PUT THE MATTER OFF FOR AT LEAST SOME TIME TO COME, AND SOME MFA OFFICIALS HAVE TOLD US THE REQUEST HAS BEEN REFUSED. AS REPORTED IN MADRID 1546 AND SINCE THEN REPEATED TO US VARIOUS TIMES BY SPANISH OFFICIALS, HOWEVER, THE FORMAL FOREIGN MINISTRY POSITION IS THAT SINCE THERE HAS BEEN NO FORMAL PROPOSAL PUT FORWARD BY THE SOVIETS, THERE HAS BEEN NOTHING.
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ING FOR THE GOS TO ACCEPT OR REFUSE. (STRICTLY SPEAKING, THE SPONSOR OF THE IDEA IS INTRAMAR, A JOINT SOVIET-SPANISH SHIPPING ENTERPRISE.) THE BRITISH EMBASSY HERE, WHICH HAS FOLLOWED THE MATTER CLOSELY BECAUSE OF THE RELATION TO GIBRALTAR, AND WITH WHICH WE HAVE BEEN IN REGULAR CONTACT ON THE MATTER, CONSIDERS THAT IT IS "IN SUSPENSE". DESPITE SUAREZ' NEGATIVE, LOCAL AUTHORITIES

IN THE ALGECIRAS AREA HAVE CONTINUED TO BEAT THE DRUMS
IN FAVOR, AND WE CONSIDER THAT IT COULD REVIVE AT SOME
POINT IN THE FUTURE.

3. REGARDING OTHER ASPECTS OF THE MAGAZINE ARTICLE, WE
NOTE THAT THE FIGURE OF 1,500 USED FOR ANNUAL MERCHANT
SHIP VISITS UNDER THE SOVIET PROPOSAL HAS ALSO BEEN USED
IN THE PAST FOR CARGO CONTAINERS THAT WOULD BE HANDLED
ANNUALLY. AS REPORTED IN 77 MADRID 9479, THE ANNUAL SHIP
VISIT FIGURES GIVEN US BY THE FOREIGN MINISTRY IN THIS
CONNECTION WERE 500 THE FIRST YEAR, 1,000 THE SECOND, AND
3,000 THE THIRD. THE ALLEGED CONCERN OVER THE ECONOMIC
IMPACT ON CEUTA IF THE SOVIETS SHIFTED THEIR SHIP-
CHANDLERING ACTIVITIES AWAY FROM THERE TO ALGECIRAS WOULD
NOT BE AN ILLOGICAL ELEMENT IN GOS THINKING ON THE SUBJECT,
NOR WOULD THE IDEA THAT SOME SORT OF CONTINUED SOVIET
PRESENCE IN CEUTA MIGHT SERVE AS A RESTRAINT ON MOROCCO,
WHICH HAS AN OUTSTANDING CLAIM TO CEUTA AND OTHER OLD
SPANISH ENCLAVES IN ITS TERRITORY AND JUST OFF ITS COAST.
THE ELEMENTS REPEATEDLY MENTIONED TO US BY MFA OFFICIALS,
HOWEVER, HAVE LAID PRINCIPAL STRESS ON THE ILLUSORY NATURE
OF THE ALLEGED ECONOMIC BENEFITS TO BE DERIVED FROM THE
ALGECIRAS EXERCISE, THE HIGH SECURITY RISK POSED BY A
SIZEABLE SOVIET PRESENCE ON THE SPANISH MAINLAND, AND A
CONCERN THAT SUCH A PRESENCE MIGHT MAKE MORE DIFFICULT A
RESOLUTION OF THE UK-SPANISH DISPUTE OVER NEARBY GIBRALTAR.
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